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Summary record of the 11th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 13 October 2004, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Kuchinsky (Ukraine)
later: Ms. Groux (Vice-Chairman) (Switzerland)

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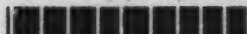
Agenda item 98: Advancement of women (*continued*)^{*}

Agenda item 99: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" (*continued*)^{*}

- * Items which the Committee has decided to consider together.

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

Organization of work

1. **The Chairman** invited the Committee to resume consideration of the issue of the invitations to special rapporteurs, independent experts and chairpersons of human rights working groups who had not received a mandate to report to the current session of the General Assembly. The proposed ad hoc invitations had raised a number of questions regarding possible financial implications, consequences for the programme of work, and the criteria to be used when considering such invitations.

2. **Mr. Khane** (Secretary of the Committee), making a statement in accordance with rule 153 of the rules of procedure, said that, in the case of the Committee's wish to extend invitations to the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children, and the Independent Expert on the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, who had not been mandated to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session, it was estimated that travel expenses amounting to \$18,000 would be required.

3. The mandates of special rapporteurs and independent experts fell under the category of activities considered to be of a perennial nature. Provisions had been included in the programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005 for activities of that nature. Necessary requirements would be met, to the extent possible, from available resources. Hence no additional appropriation would be requested.

4. Should the Committee also extend its invitation to the Chairman of the Working Group of the Commission on Human Rights on the Right to Development, it should be noted that its members were representatives of Member States. The decision would represent an exception to General Assembly resolution 1798 (XVII), as amended, on the system of travel and subsistence allowances to members of organs and subsidiary organs of the United Nations. It was anticipated that the travel costs of the Chairman of the Working Group, amounting to \$6,700, would come from extrabudgetary funds.

5. After the statement had been prepared, information had been received that the newly appointed Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons had not accepted the mandate. The statement would therefore be amended.

6. With regard to consequences for the programme of work, one hour had been allowed for each special rapporteur to make a presentation and respond to the Committee's questions. If the Committee invited three more people, one additional meeting would have to be allocated. However, extra meeting time had been anticipated for such an eventuality. Nevertheless, if the Committee should decide to invite other special rapporteurs or independent experts on an ad hoc basis, additional meeting time would be required.

7. **The Chairman** said he understood that the criteria for inviting special rapporteurs or independent experts to address the Committee required further consultation among the delegations. He suggested that Ms. Kusorgbor, Vice-Chairman, should be appointed as facilitator to lead the negotiations.

8. *It was so decided.*

9. **Mr. Cumberbatch Miguén** (Cuba) said his delegation had serious reservations about the Secretary's statement, particularly about the differentiated and discriminatory use of funds from the regular budget for the different mandates. The Chairman of the Working Group on the Right to Development was a well-known human rights expert and it was surprising that his travel expenses could not be covered by existing resources.

10. Cuba could be flexible about the interpretation made by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights if it was clear that extrabudgetary resources were available and that there was a guarantee that the Chairman of the Working Group could address the Third Committee. If the Chairman could not travel to New York under the same conditions as the representatives of the two other bodies, Cuba would oppose the invitations to all of them.

11. **Mr. Khane** (Secretary of the Committee) explained that the distinction related to the different status of the special rapporteurs, the independent expert and the Chairman of the Working Group on the Right to Development. The latter was the representative of a Member State; his travel and per diem expenses were therefore governed by different

rules; however, funds were currently available to meet his expenses from extrabudgetary provisions.

12. Ms. Tomar (India) said her delegation considered that the work of the Special Rapporteur on disability of the Commission for Social Development was very relevant for the Third Committee, which later would be addressing the issue of a comprehensive international convention on the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. Consequently, it suggested that an invitation should also be issued to the Special Rapporteur on disability.

13. Ms. Khalil (Egypt) said that her delegation fully supported all the invitations that had been mentioned, but would welcome clarification as to how many invitations would be issued and on what criteria the invitations were based.

14. Mr. Khane (Secretary of the Committee) said that, since there was currently no Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, the Committee could issue invitations only to three of the four persons mentioned in his initial statement on programme-budget implications.

15. Ms. Abdul Aziz (Malaysia), referring to the Secretary's initial statement, said she was surprised that the programme-budget implications for the Chairman of the Working Group on the Right to Development differed from those for other mechanisms and that his travel expenses might have to be met from extrabudgetary funds. The Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights had set up the Working Group; such expenses should therefore fall within the purview of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

16. Ms. Zack (United States of America), referring to the invitations to additional special rapporteurs, said that although her delegation believed that the Committee should evaluate such decisions carefully, seeking to avoid repetition between reports to the General Assembly and to the Commission on Human Rights, and recognizing the mandates of the mechanisms and the efficient use of budgetary resources, it did not object to them in principle. However, it had understood that the invitations had no programme-budget implications. The Secretary had now said that the invitation to the Chairman of the Working Group would require extrabudgetary resources, and that such resources were available. Her delegation would like clarification of the matter,

because the United States was not prepared to accept a decision of the Committee that had programme-budget implications.

17. Mr. Khane (Secretary of the Committee), responding to the proposal made by India, said that any new requests would have to be formally submitted to the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts so that it could evaluate whether they gave rise to programme-budget implications; the Committee would therefore not be able to take action on the proposal immediately.

18. In response to Malaysia, he understood that the source of funding for travel expenses and per diem was governed by different rules and regulations and varied according to whether the special rapporteur, independent expert or chairman of a working group was a private individual or a representative of a Member State.

19. In response to the United States, he said that, when the question of additional invitations had arisen initially, he had indicated that any new invitations would result in an assessment of programme-budget implications, although that did not necessarily mean that fresh funds would be required. In the case of the Chairman of the Working Group on the Right to Development, the invitation did not involve new resources. Funds were available to finance the travel of the four persons mentioned in his statement; however, since one mandate had not been accepted, the Committee could only take action on three invitations.

20. Ms. Ahmed (Sudan) said that, while welcoming the invitations under discussion and supporting the proposal made by India, her delegation considered it important to identify criteria to regulate such requests. It would also welcome final clarification as to who would be appearing before the Committee.

21. Mr. Khane (Secretary of the Committee) said that, according to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, the Independent Expert on the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, and the Chairman of the Working Group on the Right to Development had been contacted and had expressed their intention of addressing the Committee.

22. Mr. Taranda (Belarus) said that his delegation welcomed the interactive dialogue with special

rapporteurs, but only in strict compliance with their mandates. He would like to know which delegation had proposed the need to develop criteria for issuing invitations to special rapporteurs and why the Committee could not follow previous practice concerning the interactive dialogue with those special rapporteurs whose mandates included reporting to the Third Committee.

23. **Mr. Khane** (Secretary of the Committee) said that the question raised by the delegation of Belarus was one for the Committee rather than the Secretariat.

24. **Ms. Hastale** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that her country had always supported the practice of inviting special rapporteurs and independent experts to address the Committee. However, the current discussion was closely linked to the appointment of a facilitator. She suggested that the Committee should not be selective, and should issue all the invitations as a package.

25. **The Chairman** said that there was a list of rapporteurs whose invitations the Committee had already endorsed. The task now before it was to decide whether to issue invitations to three, not five, additional special rapporteurs, since the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons had not yet been officially appointed and because much more information and discussion would be needed regarding an invitation to the Special Rapporteur on disability.

26. **Ms. Naz** (Bangladesh), on a point of order, said that the Committee's decision centred on which additional special rapporteurs should be invited. Although the post of Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons was formally vacant, the Committee might surely consider inviting the incumbent-elect, formalization of whose appointment was imminent.

27. **Mr. Xie Bohua** (China) said he had wished to take the floor prior to the Chairman's announcement. However, his delegation agreed with the establishment of a facilitator to deal with the matter. The Committee's practice of inviting special rapporteurs and independent experts to address it was of long standing and such a contentious situation had never before arisen. He wished to know whether it would be procedurally correct to invite the Special Rapporteur on torture, who had recently tendered his resignation.

28. **Mr. Khane** (Secretary of the Committee), replying to the delegation of Bangladesh, said that the

appointment of the new Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons was not yet official. To the delegation of China he replied that the resignation of the Special Rapporteur on torture would become effective only on 1 December, but it was not known whether he would come to New York to address the Committee or whether the other 18 invitees would be available to do so.

29. **Ms. Groux** (Switzerland) supported the Chairman's proposal and said that the Committee should take a decision on the invitations to the additional special rapporteurs and independent experts currently on its list to which no objection had been raised. The programme-budget implications posed no problem because the money was available.

30. **The Chairman** said that delegations apparently wished to separate the decision on whether to invite the additional special rapporteurs from the decision on criteria. While the Bureau was ready to work with delegations on formulating future criteria, the Committee's specific task at the moment was clearly to invite the three special rapporteurs already on the list. He was unaware of any precedent, but while the criteria were still to be worked out, the invitations to those selected needed to be issued as soon as possible.

31. **Mr. Hayee** (Pakistan) said that any decision to invite additional special rapporteurs should be taken across the board and extended to all five. He was at a loss as to why action could not be taken on all five requests together. The Committee's decision should be beyond any suspicion of discrimination.

32. **Mr. Khane** (Secretary of the Committee) said he had just learned that the outgoing Special Rapporteur on torture would be addressing the Committee. Concerning the comment made by the delegation of Pakistan, it would be awkward to invite the future Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons since her appointment was not yet official. The new proposal made by the Indian delegation to invite a fifth additional special rapporteur could not be dealt with at that time, since 48 hours were needed to prepare the statement on programme-budget implications.

33. **Mr. Cumberbatch Miguén** (Cuba) said that a final decision was needed. In determining criteria for invitations to special rapporteurs and independent experts, account should be taken of the importance of their subject and its interest to the Committee, the person's reputation and the contribution he or she

would make to the Commission's discussion. That having been said, Cuba was in favour of issuing all five invitations requested.

34. Given the Secretariat's need to clarify the situation regarding the budget implications of the additional invitations, the matter could perhaps be postponed to the following day, but greater flexibility on the Committee's part would enable it to invite them all, including both the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons and the Special Rapporteur on disability, who dealt with a specific group of people whose human rights were important. He proposed allowing the Bureau and the Secretariat more time to work out the finances with a view to inviting all five.

35. Mr. Khane (Secretary of the Committee) said that, while the Committee might wish to consider inviting the future Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons if her appointment was finalized, he wondered what added value she could bring to the Committee's discussions if she had yet to start work.

36. The Chairman said that, while the Cuban proposal was practical, more than one day would be needed for preparing the statement on the programme-budget implications of the further two invitations. He suggested issuing the invitations to the first three additional special rapporteurs and deferring a decision on the other two to a subsequent meeting.

37. Mr. El Badri (Egypt) applauded the decision to appoint a facilitator but felt that, as a matter of principle, invitations should be issued on the basis of clear criteria. His delegation was alarmed that selection should be based on programme-budget implications, which could change from year to year. If it was decided to invite all five, then they must all be invited to all sessions as a matter of principle and not in accordance with budgetary considerations.

38. Ms. Zack (United States of America) said that her country had always supported the practice of inviting special rapporteurs and independent experts to address the Committee. While appreciating the Secretariat's clarifications and the Swiss delegation's assertion of funding availability, her delegation would like to know whether those resources would come from voluntary funds or from the contingency fund, because her delegation vehemently opposed any such charge on the latter.

39. Mr. Khane (Secretary of the Committee) reiterated that the travel expenses for the special rapporteurs, amounting to approximately \$18,000, were perennial activities covered under the programme budget. The requirements would be met from available resources and no additional resources would be requested. As for the Chairman of the Working Group, who was a representative of a Member State, funds to cover his travel to New York were available from extrabudgetary resources; no additional funding would be required.

40. Ms. Abdul Aziz (Malaysia) said that the invitation to the Special Rapporteur on disability should be treated on an equal footing with the other invitations; it should be possible to take a decision in principle on that question as well if the programme-budget implications could also be absorbed.

41. The Chairman said he would take it that the Committee wished to extend invitations to the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, the Independent Expert on the protection of human rights while countering terrorism, the Chairman of the Working Group on the Right to Development, the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons and the Special Rapporteur on disability to report to the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly.

42. *It was so decided.*

43. Ms. Naz (Bangladesh) said that, in the view of her delegation, it was for Member States to decide if special rapporteurs at the beginning of their mandates could add value to the discussion.

44. Mr. Xie Bohua (China) said that, with 23 special rapporteurs or representatives scheduled to report, care must be taken to allow sufficient time for Member States to make statements under the item as well.

45. Mr. Khane (Secretary of the Committee) said, by way of clarification, that the invitations to the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons and the Special Rapporteur on disability would be issued pending their acceptance of the appointments and their availability to come before the Committee. The relevant statements of programme-budget implications would be submitted in due course.

46. In reply to the representative of China, he said that the additional invitations indeed had implications for planning of meetings in the future, although some

flexibility had been built into the schedule for the current session.

47. **Mr. Cumberbatch Miguén** (Cuba) reiterated his delegation's view that the invitation to the Special Rapporteur on disability should not be conditional on the availability of funds.

48. **Mr. Khane** (Secretary of the Committee) drew attention to chapter II of document A/59/250, which spelled out that any decision taken by a Main Committee must be subject to a review of its programme-budget implications. He did not anticipate any difficulty in securing the necessary funding, but the procedures must be followed.

49. **Ms. Gross** (Switzerland) said she hoped that the statement of programme-budget implications would be available as soon as possible.

Agenda Item 98: Advancement of women (continued)
(A/59/38, Parts I and II, A/59/135, 185 and Corr.1, 281, 313 and 357)

Agenda Item 99: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" (continued)
(A/59/115, 214 and 281)

50. **Ms. Aziz** (Pakistan) said that the increased attention being given to issues relating to women was heartening, but progress in raising women's awareness of their rights fell far short of expectations. Globalization, while providing opportunity to many, had made women more vulnerable to exploitation. Poverty eradication was a fundamental step towards a world free of exploitation, and the political and economic empowerment of women was an essential tool.

51. Pakistan recognized gender equality as a cross-cutting theme for all development programmes. Under the Constitution, women were equal stakeholders in political and economic development and there was no gender discrimination. The Ministry of Women's Development ensured that government policy reflected equal opportunity in education and employment. Legislation to curb the practice of "honour killings" would soon come before the National Assembly. The national policy for development and empowerment of women aimed at achieving gender equality and

women's social, political and economic empowerment, through sustainable development. Policy measures to enhance women's participation had been taken in the areas of microcredit, gender-mainstreaming, free and compulsory primary education, affordable primary health care and public and private partnerships for development.

52. Local-government reforms had ensured greater participation by women in the political process. Under the reform of the Constitution, 33 per cent of seats in each tier of local government had been reserved for women. The momentum generated by local elections was also reflected in the general elections, where 60 seats in the National Assembly and 128 seats in the Provincial Assemblies had been reserved for women. There were 18 women out of 100 senators, and an unprecedented seven women in the Cabinet. Encouraged by affirmative action, women in Pakistan were working in all sectors of society and decision-making.

53. The agenda for women was vast and the challenges numerous, especially for countries like her own which bore the burden of poverty and external debt. However, it would persevere in realizing the vision of a society free from discrimination and exploitation.

54. **Mr. Gomez-Robledo** (Mexico) said that the forthcoming 10-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action would provide an opportunity to take stock of the challenges still facing women in the full exercise of their rights. The effects of economic and social problems remained more severe for women than for men.

55. Mexico had attempted to bring its national legislation into line with its international commitments for the advancement of women. The role of national mechanisms for women was more important than ever, and therefore, Mexico had supported the revitalization of the International Research and Training Institute for Women (INSTRAW). Through the mobilization of adequate resources and the strengthening of its mandate as the only body in the United Nations system devoted to research, training and information on gender equality, it would be possible to make progress under the basic strategies recommended in the Beijing Platform. More flexible coordination mechanisms were needed among the United Nations agencies related to women, including the United Nations Development

Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Sustainable development and enjoyment of fundamental rights by all could not be achieved without successful efforts for the advancement of women.

56. Ms. Groux (Switzerland), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

57. Mr. Hyassat (Jordan) said that, while there had been considerable achievements in protecting and advancing the rights of women, much remained to be done. The forthcoming review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action would provide an excellent opportunity to evaluate their implementation and identify any obstacles.

58. Gender equality and the empowerment of women were top priorities. It was important to consider ways of strengthening the mandate and funding of the relevant United Nations bodies in order to enhance the status of women. UNIFEM had played a significant role in promoting the rights and development of women. His delegation believed its capabilities and mandate should be strengthened, and the necessary resources provided, so that it could continue its work.

59. His country had been at the forefront in implementing the commitments outlined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and other relevant documents, and had taken concrete actions to reform domestic legislation in an effort to eliminate all forms of violence against women — particularly "honour crimes" — and promote gender equality. Such actions included the abolition of exemption from punishment and the introduction of harsher penalties for the perpetrators.

60. The media had also played an important role in initiating the debate on, and raising awareness of, "honour crimes", which his country viewed as incompatible with all religious, human and cultural values. Such efforts had resulted in a fall in the number of such crimes, particularly in the past three years. It should be noted that they occurred primarily because of confusion or an erroneous understanding of Islam and local customs.

61. His country would continue its efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and called on the international community to take meaningful action to ensure greater equality and opportunities for them.

62. Ms. Ahmed (Sudan) said her Government believed that the advancement of women had to be based on a comprehensive approach that considered the specificity of each society, and that the concept of equality was the foundation of her country's policies in all fields, including that of women.

63. Despite diligent efforts by international organizations, Governments, and civil-society organizations since the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, the final report of the twenty-third special session had revealed shortcomings in the implementation of the Conference's recommendations. The year 2005 will mark the tenth anniversary of the Beijing Conference and that should be a time to review the work programme and identify the impediments to progress. The effects of globalization on the economies of developing countries might leave them completely marginalized, which would inevitably affect women.

64. Her delegation welcomed the Secretary-General's report on follow-up to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (A/59/214). However, it proposed that future reports should outline the specific progress made in implementing the Beijing Platform, especially concerning the eradication of poverty and the elimination of violence against women.

65. Any approach towards the phenomenon of violence against women must consider the root causes of violence and the effectiveness of methods implemented to combat it, including national and international legislation. It was noteworthy that poor statistics about how widespread the phenomenon was hindered progress in finding solutions.

66. Her Government had established committees that enjoyed the support of civil society and women's organizations to follow up the Beijing recommendations, as well as the recommendations of Sudanese women's conferences, which covered education, health, peace, family, social stability, development and poverty eradication. It had submitted its national report on progress made in implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the recommendations of the twenty-third special session. The steps taken towards peace in the Sudan would undoubtedly have a beneficial impact on the population's living and economic conditions, especially those of women and children.

67. In conclusion, her delegation reiterated her Government's belief that the eradication of poverty and combating all forms of violence against women, including the impact of armed conflict and living under occupation, were essential components for achieving marked progress in the empowerment of women. Her delegation called for a commitment to return to family values for the sake of a society that enabled women to play their natural role of educating future generations.

68. **Mr. Hannesson** (Iceland) said that gender equality was one of his country's priorities at the national and international levels. His country had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol and he urged States that had not yet done so to do the same. He welcomed the event to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention, but expressed concern about the number of reservations.

69. At its latest session, the Commission on the Status of Women had adopted agreed conclusions on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality and on women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peace-building. His country attached great importance to the former issue and, during its presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2004, had focused on closing the gap between women's and men's pay, and on the importance of reconciling professional and family responsibilities.

70. The Commission's next session, which would review the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session, would provide an excellent opportunity to take stock of the implementation of commitments made and to identify areas in which efforts needed to be stepped up. Women's issues were closely related to other issues, such as development. His delegation therefore agreed that the review of the Platform for Action needed to consider other, upcoming United Nations conferences.

71. While considerable progress had been made in improving women's rights, vigilance was still required. He reiterated the issues of concern for his delegation, namely, trafficking in women and girls, violence against women, restrictions on the freedom of movement of women, women's lack of participation in political life, unequal pay and reproductive rights.

72. **Ms. Sauerbrey** (United States of America) said that her country had taken an array of steps to advance the rights, empowerment, well-being and prosperity of women, which continued to be among its core international priorities. One of the most pressing issues today was trafficking in persons. Her Government had taken a number of steps in that regard.

73. Child sex tourism was a particularly grim matter and fed the demand for victims of human trafficking. An act adopted in 2003 strengthened her country's ability to prevent, investigate, prosecute and punish violent crimes against children, and provided severe penalties for nationals of her country who travelled abroad to prey on children.

74. In much of the developing world, women were dying needlessly during childbirth and, increasingly, of such diseases as HIV/AIDS. Her country had taken a number of important steps to improve access to health care for women and was working with many partners to define and implement policies for basic and emergency maternal health care.

75. Refugees and internally displaced persons, most of whom were women and children, were particularly vulnerable to poverty, disease and violence. Through international organizations and non-governmental organizations, her Government spent between \$50-\$70 million annually on refugee programmes addressing health, nutrition, sanitation and gender-based violence.

76. The majority of the world's poor were women. To reduce poverty and promote economic growth, a specific fund would assist countries that ruled justly, invested in their people and encouraged economic freedom. Girls' primary-school-completion rates would be a determining factor when deciding eligibility for funding.

77. Women's economic empowerment reduced poverty, improved the economic situation of families and bettered their countries. Microcredit was one of the most successful ways to meet basic needs, build stronger communities, support civil society and promote gender equality. For the past five years, her country had committed over \$150 million annually to microenterprise development through loans, training and technical assistance.

78. She welcomed the recent elections in Afghanistan, at which voter turnout had been high. Her country was pleased to have contributed to the

remarkable political, economic and social progress that Afghanistan had experienced over the past two years. The new Afghan Constitution afforded all citizens, men and women, equal rights and duties before the law, including the right to vote and participate in the political process. Forty-one per cent of the people who had registered to vote had been women. Her Government had implemented over 200 projects to help Afghan women, ranging from education and health care to economic opportunities and political participation. A new women's teacher-training institute had recently opened to train Afghan women to teach literacy in rural and urban areas and 40 per cent of the 4.8 million Afghan children now enrolled in school were girls.

79. Progress was also being made in Iraq. A law approved in March 2004 guaranteed equal rights for all citizens and prohibited discrimination on the basis of religion, gender and other personal attributes. The law would remain valid until after democratic elections and the adoption of a new constitution in 2005. Her country was facilitating Iraqi women's involvement in their country's reconstruction, having allocated \$27 million to special programmes for Iraqi women and awarded grants to a number of non-governmental organizations that trained Iraqi women in media, entrepreneurial and democratic skills and practices.

80. Her country was committed to advancing women's political participation and had introduced a draft resolution on that subject during the fifty-eighth session (resolution 58/142). It was also supporting many projects in various countries. All issues were women's issues — whether fighting HIV/AIDS and poverty, improving health care and education, promoting the rule of law, or encouraging business formation and the creation of good jobs. Empowering women through equal access to education and economic opportunity boosted their chances of making informed choices in society and gave them more tools to combat poverty and widen democracy. Such issues were important to making women and their families safe, secure and prosperous.

81. Ms. Li Xiaomei (China) said that, since the General Assembly's fifty-eighth session, the United Nations had made considerable progress in the advancement of women, the protection of women's rights and follow-up to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session.

82. During its latest session, the Commission on the Status of Women had adopted agreed conclusions on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality and on women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and resolution, as endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in resolutions 2004/11 and 12. Her delegation had actively participated in those activities and was ready to work with all other countries to promote those goals.

83. The report of the Secretary-General on measures taken and progress achieved in follow-up to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (A/59/214) reviewed steps taken by the Assembly and its Main Committees during its fifty-eighth session to promote the achievement of the goal of gender equality through the gender mainstreaming strategy. Her delegation agreed with the Secretary-General's recommendations and urged the Assembly and its subsidiary bodies to take specific steps to ensure gender mainstreaming.

84. Her delegation attached great importance to the review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and of the outcome document of the twenty-third special session, which would be conducted during the Commission's next session, and would cooperate closely with the Bureau and other Member States in preparing for it. The review should focus on implementation at the national level, so that experiences could be exchanged and gaps and obstacles identified.

85. Her country had made marked progress in gender equality since the World Conference on Women in Beijing, as reflected in its solemn commitment to gender mainstreaming, its advocacy of a balanced gender perspective in economic and social development, the establishment of a legal system to promote gender equality, the improvement in women's political participation and access to employment, education and health care, and the increased awareness of gender equality. Her Government was working actively with non-governmental organizations to prepare for the tenth anniversary of the Beijing Conference with a view to safeguarding and promoting women's rights and interests.

86. **Mr. Reyes Rodríguez (Cuba)** said that, nearly 10 years after the Beijing Conference, women continued to be excluded from the benefits and opportunities of globalization and to suffer most from the scourge of war, hunger and preventable diseases. The number of women in the working population had increased only slightly in the past 20 years and women continued to earn less than men for the same job. Two thirds of the world's illiterate and poor were women, and almost half a million died owing to a lack of care during pregnancy, childbirth or abortion. Without the necessary political will, the commitments made in Beijing and at the twenty-third special session would not be met. National efforts, particularly in developing countries, needed to be accompanied by international cooperation based on the principles of respect for sovereignty, independence, self-determination and non-interference in the internal affairs of States.

87. A key objective of the Cuban revolution had always been the full integration of women, with equal rights and opportunities, in all spheres and regions of the country. His country was proud to have been the first to sign and the second to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol. The profound economic, social and political changes in his country had favoured the advancement of women. Nonetheless, a number of factors continued to hinder complete gender equality.

88. In 1997, his country had passed a law on the follow-up to the Beijing Conference which included actions aimed at eliminating barriers and creating the right conditions for an ongoing improvement in women's position in society. Measures had been adopted in employment, promotion and access to power, community work, legislation, reproductive and sexual rights, and the presence and image of women in the media. Such progress was all the more impressive given the United States' continuing economic, financial and trade embargo on his country, which affected women in particular.

89. His country reiterated the call on Governments, regional and international organizations, and the United Nations system to take steps to oppose unilateral measures that were incompatible with international law and the Charter, prevented the full economic and social development of the population of the countries concerned, particularly women and

children, endangered their well-being and prevented them from fully enjoying their human rights.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.



General Assembly

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Third Committee

Summary record of the 12th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 14 October 2004, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Ms. Abdul Aziz (Vice-Chairman) (Malaysia)
later: Mr. Kuchinsky (Chairman) (Ukraine)
later: Ms. Abdul Aziz (Vice-Chairman) (Malaysia)

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Agenda item 98: Advancement of women (continued)*

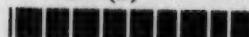
Agenda item 99: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" (continued)*

- * Items which the Committee has decided to consider together.

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04-55279 (E)



In the absence of Mr. Kuchinsky (Ukraine), Ms. Abdul Aziz (Malaysia), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda Item 98: Advancement of women (continued)
(A/59/38, Parts I and II, A/59/135, 185 and Corr.1, 281, 313 and 357)

Agenda Item 99: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" (continued)
(A/59/115, 214 and 281)

1. **Ms. Onyoni-Mogaka (Kenya)** said that her delegation joined the international community in celebrating the award of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize to her compatriot, Professor Maathai, Assistant Minister for Environment and Natural Resources, for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace. The first African woman thus recognized, she illustrated women's important leadership role and inspired women across the world.

2. In implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the twenty-third special session, her Government had undertaken various measures to ensure the removal of social, cultural and legal obstacles to the promotion and reinforcement of gender equality.

3. In legislative terms, an act of 2003 had removed inconsistencies between penalties for sexual offences against minors and women. The Government had also established family courts to handle issues related to gender discrimination, violence against women and sex offences. Furthermore, all forms of sexual harassment in the public sector had been outlawed. The National Commission on Gender Development had recently been set up as the focal point for gender mainstreaming in all sectors. Police were being trained in gender issues, and new specialized police units consisting mainly of women dealt with child abuse, rape and other violence against women.

4. Her country's efforts to implement the Beijing Platform were beset by major challenges adversely affecting women's livelihoods. Yet women were crucial to the development agenda, being the country's main agricultural producers, and owning almost half of all micro and small enterprises, a situation that was

expected to be reinforced with sustained economic growth. But such growth could be achieved only with increased official development assistance, which had declined by more than 40 per cent in the previous decade. Improvement in the pattern of agricultural trade and increased exports would help the advancement of women. Economic empowerment of women would address both gender equality and the issue of poverty-linked violence against them.

5. Not only did the overwhelming majority of people with HIV/AIDS live in developing countries, but sub-Saharan Africa was home to three quarters of all HIV-positive women. Assistance to regions and nations to curb the pandemic must take account of differences in modes of transmission and the burden of disease. Kenya had not been spared. With a 7 per cent HIV-positive adult population, women were often widowed, thus increasing their psychological, financial and physical burden. Recognizing the gender dimension of HIV/AIDS, the President had reinvigorated the anti-AIDS campaign, placing greater emphasis on community-based activities. The countrywide National Women's Programme of Prevention, Advocacy and Support, aimed at mainstreaming gender in the fight against the pandemic, needed to be accompanied by enhanced funding for HIV/AIDS-related activities.

6. Her country would continue to cooperate in the forging of partnerships for the promotion of the rights of women and girls and for their social, political and economic empowerment.

7. **Mr. Osmane (Algeria)** said that the Beijing Conference had been the turning-point in the pursuit of development, peace and equality, crowning, as it had, the long and painful struggle by women the world over for recognition of their rights and status. In a frequently difficult environment, national and international action had been taken to put into practice the commitments undertaken at Beijing and at the twenty-third special session by introducing policies and programmes with a broader gender-specific dimension that would afford women equal opportunities in all areas.

8. The degree of success would be judged at the high-level meeting of the General Assembly in 2005, which would review the outcome of major United Nations conferences and progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. It would provide the

opportunity to consider new and better approaches to the promotion of women's fundamental rights. No progress was possible in any area without the equal participation of women. In that regard, he paid tribute to the efforts deployed by the United Nations, civil society and feminist organizations.

9. Africa was the region where the status of women was most dire and where they were the first to be affected by the continent's multidimensional problems of chronic underdevelopment and extreme poverty, exacerbated by armed conflict. Their already precarious lives were further undermined by a dearth of basic services, illiteracy and the AIDS pandemic. The lives of millions of women worldwide underscored the need to incorporate into the implementation of the Beijing Platform the outcome of major United Nations conferences on social, economic and financial questions. Attention should also be drawn to the situation of women living under foreign occupation, especially in Palestine and the occupied Arab territories.

10. Since the Beijing Conference, Algeria had endeavoured to implement the Declaration and Platform by elaborating a wide-ranging national plan and mobilizing considerable resources in some of the most important social areas. Algerian women had already fought courageously beside men in the cause of national liberation and had won national recognition as their full equals, as they had done later in the fight against terrorism, in which they had paid dearly.

11. Algeria had taken steps since its independence to enable women to participate, on an equal footing with men, in the country's political, economic and social life and was now striving to further consolidate and promote women's rights. To that end, a Ministry for the Family and the Status of Women, headed by a woman, had been established in 2002. A bill amending the Family Code would introduce innovations concerning the family unit, gender equality and the protection of women and children.

12. Ms. Heshiki (Japan) said that the status of Japanese women and of women around the world had greatly improved since the entry into force of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Japan's ratification in 1985 had had its effect on the country's legal framework and had led to many improvements in women's lives.

13. Based on its own post-war experience that peacebuilding and reconstruction could open up opportunities for women and that gender equality could serve to achieve peace and security, Japan had been supporting a United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) project in Afghanistan through the Trust Fund for Human Security it had established within the United Nations for the promotion of social reintegration of female refugees and displaced persons. That support included vocational training, seminars and income-generating programmes in order to enable women to assume more active roles in post-conflict Afghanistan.

14. The Government had recently established an inter-agency coordination mechanism as part of Japan's comprehensive effort to combat trafficking in women and girls, and would strengthen its crackdown on all those involved and protect victims through a variety of measures. Convinced that such trafficking could be eradicated only if countries of origin, transit and destination implemented joint measures, Japan was working closely to that end with concerned Governments, international organizations and civil society. It had also participated in the Bali process, which involved regional cooperation to combat trafficking. Accordingly, her delegation welcomed the appointment of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, whose work could further enhance bilateral, regional and international cooperation in that field.

15. The situation in which women lived under armed conflict was intolerable and the rate of HIV infection among women and girls, of which gender inequality was one cause, was also of deep concern to her country, while violence against women was both a cause and a consequence of HIV/AIDS, the spread of which also affected human security. Women beaten or dominated by their male partners were more likely to become infected than women with non-violent partners. Education for women about their rights and about the disease was needed in order to break the link between violence and AIDS. In that connection, Japan had assisted a number of projects through the UNIFEM Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence against Women in order to combat the spread of the disease to women in developing countries.

16. Although references to gender perspectives had clearly increased quantitatively within the United Nations system since the Beijing Declaration and

Platform for Action, there was still limited qualitative attention to the issue, as pointed out in the Secretary-General's report (A/59/214). It was important that the Committee's discussion on gender issues should not simply pay them lip service but should lead to concrete action and, the implementation of commitments with system-wide coordination. On the eve of the 10-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform, Japan hoped that men and boys would join women and girls in the pursuit of gender equality.

17. **Mr. Bexultan** (Kazakhstan) said his country had resolved to undertake a comprehensive analysis on ways of overcoming gender inequality. Although it had achieved steady economic growth, a country did not grow without the equal participation of women. The National Commission on the Family and Women protected their rights and legal interests and worked with the Government to implement the 2005 Gender Strategy. The Government was working to ensure more active involvement of women in economic life, and Parliament was currently studying an equal-opportunities bill, in whose preparation non-governmental organizations and civil society had played an important role.

18. Kazakhstan's achievements included increased representation of women at decision-making levels; a plan for women's economic development and for better health care and education for women and children; and the strengthening of moral values, including the family and marriage. His delegation was grateful to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and other bodies for their help in implementing the decisions of United Nations major conferences and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Family and children were priorities for the authorities, who wished to shield them from need, want or hunger.

19. **Mr. Kuchinsky** (Ukraine) took the Chair.

20. **Ms. Assoumou** (Côte d'Ivoire) said that the adage "Educate a girl and you educate a nation" underpinned the role of women in both traditional and modern societies. Women, the main agricultural producers in developing countries, were a force for economic and social achievements and biological and social reproduction, and agents of socialization of new generations. And yet, they did not enjoy the same treatment as their male counterparts.

21. Determined to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and ensure their follow-up, her country had ratified regional and international conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the relevant International Labour Organization convention. In its efforts to change attitudes, in line with the principles prescribed therein, the Government had prepared the National Action Plan for Women 2003-2007 with the aim of improving the status and living conditions of women by ensuring greater equity between men and women regarding responsibilities and opportunities for economic and social development.

22. The Plan was the basis for key programmes designed to increase women's earnings by 20 per cent by 2007; improve women's health and living conditions and protect them from violence; increase girls' school attendance and improve women's education; and promote the legal status of women, while raising their level of participation in decision-making in senior political and administrative posts. The Plan embodied a forward-looking approach to gender and development, addressing the topical issues of globalization, HIV/AIDS, the New Partnership for Africa's Development and poverty alleviation. The poverty-reduction strategy contained a gender segment that recognized women's key role. Implementation of the Plan would help reduce the male-female divide in which women's representation in public office was abysmally low.

23. Her Government was committed to transforming the country's crisis situation into one of peace, which alone could ensure implementation of policies for the advancement of women.

24. **Ms. Martina** (Ukraine) said that her country saw women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming not only as an important objective, but also as a means of achieving the Millennium Development Goals. It reaffirmed its commitment to the Beijing Platform and the outcome of the twenty-third special session, both of which constituted the overarching framework for gender equality. One aspect of the Government's proactive approach in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment had been the establishment of a national plan based on the Beijing Platform.

25. Despite major efforts at all levels, much remained to be done. In that connection, she emphasized the

importance of the forthcoming session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which afforded an ideal opportunity to build on current achievements and generate momentum for the high-level meeting of the General Assembly to be held in 2005. Supporting further integration of gender issues into the work of the United Nations, Ukraine welcomed the Economic and Social Council's recent review and appraisal of the implementation of its agreed conclusions 1997/2, but considered that much more was required in terms of monitoring, reporting and accountability on gender mainstreaming. She was convinced that the thirty-first session of the General Assembly of the International Council of Women, which her country would host in 2006, would boost efforts aimed at gender equality.

26. Sexual exploitation and trafficking — the worst forms of violence against women — were on the rise. The multidimensional nature of trafficking in women and girls called for a comprehensive approach encompassing socio-economic, cultural, legal and other factors. In that regard, she welcomed United Nations measures to respond to that challenge and stressed the importance of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), which recognized women's vital role and experience in peacemaking, peacebuilding and peacekeeping. She commended the recent efforts of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations to focus on the trafficking problem, as well as the recent appointment by the Commission on Human Rights of a Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, which would break new ground.

27. Her Government was implementing a comprehensive anti-trafficking programme, and the new Criminal Code established criminal liability for trafficking in persons. In 2003, as part of its awareness-raising and capacity-building activities, the Government, in cooperation with national and international non-governmental organizations, had held an All-Ukrainian "16 Days without Gender Violence" to attract attention to the issue. Increased attention was also being paid to the problem in connection with the current commemoration of the Year of the Family in Ukraine. The Government looked forward to implementation of the cooperation agreement recently concluded with the International Organization for Migration for the establishment in Ukraine of five rehabilitation centres for victims of trafficking.

28. Ms. Faye (Senegal) said that women, the backbone of the family in Africa, were confronted on a

daily basis with discrimination, marginalization, lack of access to education, to information and to health care, violation of their rights, and all forms of violence. Senegal had participated in all the major conferences on women's issues, which had enabled Africa and the international community to reaffirm the close link between sustainable development, gender equality and the advancement of women. In 1994, Senegal had also hosted the Fifth African Regional Conference on Women.

29. Based on the priorities identified in Beijing and an in-depth study of the situation of women in Senegalese society, the second National Action Plan aimed to further empower women at all levels and eliminate discrimination against them. The main thrusts of the Plan were women's economic advancement and the fight against poverty; education, women's training and girls' school attendance; women's and girls' health, including reproductive and sexual health and family planning; fundamental and acquired rights of women and girls and access to decision-making; and institutional mechanisms for the advancement and financing of women.

30. Poverty eradication and sustainable development depended largely on the elimination of gender inequalities. For that reason, the Senegalese Government had resolved, with the assistance of all development actors, to banish discrimination and help men and women enjoy equally not only the privilege of contributing to the country's development, but also its economic opportunities. Hence, there were now many Senegalese women in powerful positions, including Parliament and strategic government posts. On the legislative front, a law on female genital mutilation was currently before the National Assembly, and all legislative reforms were accompanied by specific action in favour of women's participation in decision-making and in the formulation of national policies and programmes.

31. Her delegation welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of UNIFEM (A/59/135), whose collaboration with her Government had been instrumental in enabling women suffering from HIV/AIDS to be reintegrated into society. In conclusion, she noted that full implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security would go a long way towards the advancement of women.

32. **Mr. Sallam** (Saudi Arabia) said that his Government attached great importance to the role of women in society and was doing its utmost to provide them with the tools they needed to improve their status. Education, the key to the advancement of women, was free for all; currently in Saudi Arabia there were more women enrolled in secondary education than men.

33. Discrimination of any type was against the teachings of Islam, and women enjoyed full civil rights, including the right to buy and sell, conduct business and secure their own housing. Saudi Arabia had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and had participated actively in the Durban Conference on racism. The Constitution contained specific provisions outlawing racist organizations.

34. **Ms. Al-Shamisi** (United Arab Emirates) said that it was a sad reality that women and children were the first to be affected by economic crises and armed conflict, which made them vulnerable to exploitation and poverty. No progress in the advancement of women could be achieved without permanent solutions to poverty, hunger, armed conflict and foreign occupation, which required swift implementation of the resolutions and recommendations of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and other international forums on development.

35. The Constitution of the United Arab Emirates provided equality, social justice, security and equal opportunity for all persons. Its national development policy was derived from Islam, and called for a society where the human being was the focus of development and women were considered major partners. To demonstrate its commitment to the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, six national mechanisms for the advancement of women had been established. The United Arab Emirates had also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

36. National legislation — in addition to social traditions derived from Islam, which called for compassion and social solidarity — had created a safe social and family environment that provided women with protection from all forms of violence and exploitation. Women represented more than 50 per cent of students enrolled in higher education. Women

worked in all sectors of the economy and occupied 30 per cent of the decision-making positions in the public and private sectors.

37. Her delegation was very concerned about the difficult living conditions of women in Palestine, in particular, and called on the international community to increase its efforts to find permanent and comprehensive solutions that would provide them security and stability to live in dignity and prosperity.

38. **Ms. Mtshali** (South Africa) said that the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly had acknowledged that one billion people, the majority of them women in the developing world, still lived in severe poverty. They were citizens of the countries, many in Africa, that might never achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The plight of those women should be considered at the 10-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action to be held in 2005. Furthermore, the members of the international community should use that opportunity to renew their commitments to bring about a better life for women all over the world. She recalled that the Millennium Declaration stressed women's empowerment as an essential component in poverty eradication.

39. Another issue of concern was violence against women and girls, which was closely linked to trafficking in women and girls for sexual and other forms of exploitation. South Africa had put in place a Domestic Violence Act and also a Victim Empowerment Programme, which was an intergovernmental strategy in partnership with non-governmental organizations, for the support, protection and empowerment of victims of crime and violence, with a special focus on women and children. In that context, her delegation particularly welcomed the reports of the Secretary-General on violence against women (A/59/281) and on trafficking in women and girls (A/59/185). South Africa had recently ratified the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish the Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children, and was in the process of developing the relevant legislation.

40. Gender mainstreaming should place gender equality at the centre of analysis, policy decisions, plans and programmes, monitoring, budget and institutional structures. It must also be taken into account within the United Nations system, and her

delegation had full confidence in the Secretary-General's commitment to reaching the goal of gender parity.

41. Ms. Molaroni (San Marino) said she was proud to report that San Marino had recently become party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Women had long held privileged status in her country, one of the few in Europe which was accustomed to seeing women as head of State. They had not achieved total equality, however, because they did not have the right to transmit their nationality to their children: only fathers who were nationals of San Marino could transmit nationality. In June 2004, 1,703 years after the foundation of the Republic, legislation had finally been passed giving women that right. In addition, a Ministry of Equal Opportunity had been established. She hoped many more countries would work towards full compliance with their international commitments.

42. Mr. Gansukh (Mongolia) commended the current commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention, which had drawn attention to the fact that, although significant progress had been made, full equality for women both in law and in practice had not yet been achieved. Numerous challenges also remained in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, and his delegation supported the recommendations contained in the relevant report of the Secretary-General (A/59/214). In the Millennium Development Goals, world leaders had renewed their commitment to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to confront poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate sustainable development.

43. Women in Mongolia still faced the challenge of interrelated problems: poverty, unemployment, and lack of education, health care and social protection. Despite some progress in implementing the National Programme for the Advancement of Women 1996-2002, unemployment and poverty rates had not decreased significantly, while living standards continued to deteriorate. A new Programme on Gender Equality for the period up to 2015 promoted the family as the basic unit of society and prioritized critical areas of concern with time-bound goals and explicit monitoring and evaluation indicators. Parliament had also adopted new State policies on family development and population development respectively, to promote gender equality in that framework, in addition to a law

on domestic violence. Issues related to gender equality and women's participation in consolidating democracy had also been raised at the Fifth International Conference on New and Restored Democracies, held in Mongolia in 2004.

44. Ms. Abdul Aziz (Malaysia), Vice-Chairman, resumed the Chair.

45. Ms. Seljuki (Afghanistan) said that, at the national elections of 9 October 2004, more than 10 million people in Afghanistan had turned out to vote; 40 per cent had been women, reflecting the interest of Afghan women in determining the course of affairs in their country. In the past three years, the Government had taken a number of landmark decisions that would benefit Afghan women, including the ratification of the Convention and the drafting of the new Constitution, which guaranteed equal rights for women under the law and their participation in the political life of the country, restoring rights which had been ignored and violated during decades of war and under the rule of the Taliban. The gains made with respect to the advancement of women had taken place through the good will and support of the men of Afghanistan.

46. One of the major casualties of nearly a quarter century of war had been the country's educational system. With weakened infrastructure and disregard for the rule of law, the people of Afghanistan had been subject to patriarchal tribal custom, where women were naturally disadvantaged. The panacea to the country's many social woes was education. During the years of conflict, a high percentage of the female population had had no access to education, either due to lack of schools, barriers of tradition or the erroneous interpretation of religious teachings. Currently, there was an overwhelming yearning for good education, and record numbers of girls and women had enrolled in schools and institutions of higher learning. More than 40 per cent of children enrolled in school were girls. She appealed to the international community to continue and enhance its assistance to Afghanistan, especially to enable it to meet the constitutional guarantee of free education for all its citizens.

47. Mr. Raju (India) said that his delegation was pleased to note that the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) had undertaken a number of important initiatives as a result of the dynamic efforts by the

newly appointed director to revitalize the institution, but the full success of the process depended on broad political and financial support by Governments.

48. His delegation was concerned that, almost a year after the important initiative adopted by the General Assembly calling for a study in resolution 58/185, on violence against women, the study had not yet begun. National action plans remained important tools for action in that area, and in India, a bill on domestic violence would be reintroduced to Parliament at the current session. In combating trafficking in women and girls — a global phenomenon — institutional arrangements at the bilateral, regional and international levels had become indispensable. India was active in both regional and national efforts to combat that problem.

49. India had gone beyond institutional, legal and educational measures to strengthen the ability of women at the political level by taking affirmative action that reserved one third of seats for women candidates in all local, village and municipal elections. That provision of the Constitution had been a powerful instrument in giving women the opportunity to influence formal structures of economics, political and social decision-making.

50. Despite the many advances of recent decades, the gap between de jure and de facto equality of women remained in much of the world. The challenge was to bridge the gap between promise and performance to ensure genuine gender equality. Gender mainstreaming and a rights-based approach had contributed to the progress made, but gender equality had been least possible where resources were scarce, and the international community must recognize that correlation and act accordingly.

51. Ms. Bethel (Bahamas), said that much remained to be done before the targets the international community had set itself in the areas of gender equality and women's empowerment could be attained. Those goals were themselves vital steps on the road to social and economic development, peace and security. It was important to ensure that the forthcoming review of the implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women and of the twenty-third special session would be action-oriented and would feed constructively into the subsequent review of the implementation of the social and economic undertakings made in the Millennium Declaration.

52. Her country had a strong record of political participation by women and of women's access to decision-making: Bahamian women consistently outnumbered men in exercising their right to vote; they also occupied a very significant proportion of elected offices and government posts and the overwhelming majority of the top executive positions in government agencies; many women had risen to the highest levels of the judicial system. Such achievements would not have been possible, however, had the Bahamas not met its international commitments in other areas affecting women's empowerment.

53. She thanked the Division for the Advancement of Women for its initiative in organizing a regional colloquium on the domestic application of international human rights law and a regional training workshop on implementation of, and reporting under, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, both of which had been hosted by the Bahamas earlier in the year.

54. The world's development and prosperity depended on the development and empowerment of fully one half of humanity and she called on all States to reaffirm their commitment to meeting the undertakings they had made at the major conferences relating to the advancement of women.

55. Ms. Hoch (Liechtenstein) said her delegation aligned itself with the statement made by the European Union at an earlier meeting.

56. Liechtenstein had signed all the international instruments relating to trafficking in women and girls and planned to ratify them once the necessary adjustments had been made to its domestic legislation. Ratification of such instruments, in conjunction with the monitoring of their implementation, formed a basis on which to build an effective strategy against trafficking in human beings. National policy measures and strong and consistently enforced domestic legislation were equally important.

57. Liechtenstein agreed with the view that the international instruments should provide a framework for action to be complemented by regional and subregional instruments, and it was actively involved in negotiations on the proposed convention on action against trafficking in human beings that was currently being drafted in the Council of Europe in order to facilitate international cooperation in providing protection and assistance to victims. Cooperation

between the countries of origin, transit and destination was also essential, and Liechtenstein was working closely with judicial and law-enforcement authorities in neighbouring countries.

58. Prevention was as important as protection and prosecution, however, and in that regard it was necessary to address the root causes of trafficking, such as the feminization of poverty and gender inequalities in the labour market, education and access to certain occupations. A common thread and overriding concern was violence against women.

59. A range of principles, guidelines and recommendations on means of protecting women and girls from trafficking had been put in place by organizations at all levels. Effective implementation of the commitments made in the areas of social development and the advancement and empowerment of women would constitute significant progress in combating the problem.

60. Ms. Radhi (Bahrain) said that women played an effective role in every area of life and made an invaluable contribution to decision-making. Arab women in the region as a whole had made considerable progress in the past decade, during which a plethora of bodies had been set up to promote women's rights and the first Arab Summit for Women had been held.

61. In Bahrain, a reform programme had been launched in 1999 to legitimize women's expanding role and eliminate all forms of discrimination against them. Under the Constitution, women enjoyed all civil and political rights and exercised electoral rights as voters and as candidates. The number of women occupying senior posts in government, administration and business had tripled between 1991 and 2001 and women students were in the majority in higher education. There were several women's NGOs, which played an effective role in defending women's rights.

62. At the regional level, the Secretary-General of Bahrain's Supreme Council for Women had been appointed Chair of the legal unit of the Arab Women Organization, which advised Arab States on ways of improving their legislation so as to promote the advancement of women. Bahrain had started to review its own legislation in order to bring it into line with the relevant international conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to which it was a signatory.

63. The positive changes currently under way at all levels of society would enable women to play a role in building a modern Bahrain.

64. Ms. Kyung-ah Lee (Republic of Korea) said the Republic of Korea had made strenuous efforts over the past 10 years to combat violence against women through legislative and institutional measures, and public awareness of the issue had been considerably enhanced. In particular, under new legislation on violence relating to prostitution, women who were trafficked or lured into prostitution through violence, coercion or fraud were considered not criminals but victims and were therefore exempt from prosecution and entitled to protection.

65. Her Government would shortly be organizing a regional meeting of experts, the last in a series of three, that would focus on the protection of victims of international trafficking. There was a disturbing tendency for the victims of trafficking to be treated unfavourably, so it was hoped that the meeting would make a concrete contribution to efforts to protect such women.

66. The Republic of Korea had made great strides in promoting women's participation in decision-making. It had set minimum quotas to ensure greater equality of male and female employment in the civil service and a target of 10 per cent of women in senior government positions by 2006.

67. Lastly, she said the proportion of women members of the National Assembly had risen to 13 per cent at the last elections. While that figure still fell short of the target set under the Millennium Development Goals for women parliamentarians, she believed her Government was on the right track in encouraging women's participation in decision-making.

68. Ms. Sonalke (Nigeria) said that under Nigeria's Constitution, all three branches of government were responsible for protecting women against discriminatory practices, policies and legislation. The National Action Committee on Women in Politics was responsible for developing strategies for the mobilization and participation of women in all electoral processes. Existing legislation, including the Penal Code, was being reviewed to ensure it did not place women at a disadvantage or was gender-insensitive. Women were recognized as able partners in development and were at the centre of the National Poverty Eradication Programme.

69. The Government was making determined efforts, through legislative measures, to eradicate violence against girls and trafficking in women. Given that trafficking was a crime that cut across national boundaries, however, international cooperation and an effective international legal framework were essential.

70. Such topics as the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality and women's equal participation in conflict-prevention, management and resolution and in peacebuilding were crucial to gender equality and she welcomed their inclusion on the agenda of the forthcoming session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Notwithstanding the progress made, women were still largely excluded from high-level decision-making in many countries. In addition to implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, traditional cultural attitudes must also be changed, and that could be done only by involving men and boys in promoting equality.

71. Meaningful advancement of women involved recognition of the heavy burden shouldered by women and girls in families affected by AIDS. The international community must step up efforts to curb the pandemic and respond appropriately to the special needs of the women and children it affected.

72. She welcomed the bold initiative to reinvigorate INSTRAW and the efforts being made to improve the status of women in the Secretariat. She urged the Secretary-General to appoint more women to senior positions, in accordance with the principle of equitable geographical distribution.

73. **Mr. Al-Shary** (Oman) said that comprehensive development of the Sultanate of Oman had begun in 1970 when His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said had assumed power. The Government had established 38 women's organizations across the country and had started an information database on the situation of women and their participation in social, political and economic life.

74. A marked improvement in the standard of living and an increase in life expectancy had taken place in Oman as a result of government efforts to improve health services, awareness campaigns, and family planning programmes. There was an almost equal participation of women and men in education. At the primary and secondary levels, 36 per cent of schools were for males and 35 per cent were for females while

29 per cent were mixed schools. In higher education, half of those registered for diplomas and graduate courses were women. In the workforce, women held nearly one third of government positions and about one fifth of jobs in the private sector.

75. Under the law, women were free to own or manage their own businesses and had access to training programmes and loans on easy terms. Omani women occupied such positions as managers, ambassadors, ministers and members of the State Council, the Consultative Council and other bodies.

76. **Mr. Chowdhury** (Bangladesh) said that the sustained political will of the international community was necessary to ensure implementation of the commitments made to gender equality and the empowerment of women. Gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment were key components of Bangladeshi policy. Until recently, women were a vulnerable group in a traditional society, but a tremendous societal change was under way, which had gone a long way towards outlawing extremist ideology and actions.

77. Bangladesh considered that sustainable development could only take place against the backdrop of democracy, human rights and gender equality. Moreover, economic independence and education were critical to ensure the empowerment of women and it had invested heavily in women's education and economic emancipation. The process of mainstreaming women economically and politically was being fuelled by microcredit and non-formal education initiatives, leading to an increase in women's share of the workforce over the past decade.

78. The Government and the opposition in Parliament had been headed by women for the past 13 years and women held senior political and diplomatic positions. Women were also venturing into non-traditional professions such as the police and the military and had participated in United Nations peacekeeping operations.

79. Bangladesh was a State party to almost all the major instruments on women's rights. In keeping with the Beijing commitments, stringent legislation had been enacted to protect women and girls from prejudices and all forms of violence and discrimination; however, to be effective, legislation had to be complied with and enforced. Bangladesh had also been closely associated with the adoption of the

landmark Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security and, as the largest troop contributor to peacekeeping currently, it had a significant role to play in furthering the goals of that resolution in all post-conflict societies.

80. Violence against women required multidimensional approaches involving the United Nations and other relevant stakeholders. Civil society and the media could also play an important role by raising awareness of the consequences of violence on the well-being of women. It was also necessary to tackle the problem of trafficking in women and girls at all levels, and Bangladesh had played a pioneering role in the adoption of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution. The issue of women in conflict situations remained a concern, particularly in areas under foreign occupation, as in the occupied Palestinian territory.

81. Mr. Ngo Duc Thang (Viet Nam) said that, following Viet Nam's ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, it had established a comprehensive legal framework to promote women's human rights in line with the Convention. The Government had adopted a strategy for the advancement of women up to 2010, whose overall objective was to promote women's physical and spiritual life and to facilitate the realization of their rights in all areas.

82. Women's role and participation in State administration and political leadership had increased significantly, and Viet Nam had one of the highest participation rates of women in Parliament of all the Asian countries. In addition, around half the labour force were women and they were represented in all sectors of the economy. The sexes were also equally represented in primary education.

83. His Government had made great efforts in recent years to eradicate violence against women, including trafficking in women and girls, in part through legislation, but also by ratifying international instruments and concluding regional and bilateral agreements to ensure the prosecution of offenders; it was also taking preventive measures by addressing root causes.

84. Trafficking was a "silent crime", far harder to tackle than drug or arms trafficking or even terrorism.

It could not be fought by one country single-handedly but required close regional and international coordination. His Government therefore welcomed all initiatives to strengthen international cooperation in that regard.

85. Mr. Gallegos (Ecuador) said that the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 2004 and the tenth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 2005 provided opportunities to inform the international community about achievements in the protection and promotion of women's rights and to identify the obstacles that must be overcome in order to accomplish the universal application of the principles of the Convention and the Platform for Action.

86. Gender equality was an essential component of sustainable development, but discrimination against women still persisted in many countries and the specific vulnerability of women in the face of diseases such as HIV/AIDS and situations of armed conflict remained to be tackled. Women should therefore play a greater role in political activities in their respective countries, and policies and programmes to end violence against women and girls should be strengthened.

87. Ecuador had made great progress in improving women's rights and instituting policies that benefited women and advanced gender equality. In addition, it had established that all international instruments relating to violence against women, and ratified by Ecuador should be operative in the domestic sphere. The office of UNIFEM in Ecuador was doing significant work providing training on the economic and social rights of women. That had led to the establishment of an economic-rights network composed of more than 60 women's organizations which was promoting the incorporation of gender-related issues into government microcredit programmes.

88. Ecuador was firmly convinced of the need to strengthen the role of women in order to achieve the country's social and economic development, and the Government was designing and implementing policies and programmes benefiting women in relation to violence, health, education, work and access to resources.

89. Ms. Osaki (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) said that, as the 10-year review

of the Beijing Platform for Action and the five-year review of the Millennium Declaration approached, UNDP would continue to do everything possible to make its shared vision of gender equality and the empowerment of women a reality. It had consistently supported initiatives relating to women's rights and had helped Governments review and revoke laws that discriminated against women. It was attending the Seventh African Regional Conference on Women, currently being held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in order to participate in the 10-year review of the Beijing Platform and showcase its gender programmes in the region. The conference was seeking to shape a regional consensus on priority gender issues and to chart the way forward. The outcome would provide an important input into the global review in 2005.

90. UNDP had made the deliberate choice not to establish a separate area for gender equality, but to pursue the goal through gender mainstreaming, because the issue was too important to assign it to a separate category, where it risked becoming isolated. However, mainstreaming was not a licence for inaction, but included the responsibility to ensure that gender issues were fully integrated into its activities and policies; support for gender mainstreaming cut across the work of UNDP in all 166 countries where it was present. Despite the many successes, further action was needed to ensure that successful interventions were replicated and expanded. It was encouraging that the preliminary results of the comprehensive gender review of all the national and regional reports on the Millennium Development Goals undertaken by the United Nations Poverty Group indicated a steady improvement in the way gender equality had been addressed across all the goals.

91. UNDP was also working in partnership with other agencies, including UNIFEM, seeking to leverage the latter's expertise and maximize its role as a catalyst of innovative, gender-related programming within the United Nations system.

92. **Ms. Mbikusita-Lewanika** (Commonwealth Secretariat) said that, as a consequence of women's struggle for their rights, the granting of women's human rights had improved in many ways throughout the world. One of the most significant achievements was the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1979. Throughout the Commonwealth, efforts had been made to ratify, implement and monitor the Convention.

93. The Commonwealth had been working towards the advancement of gender equality, and successive plans of action had brought about a greater awareness of gender issues. As a result of the Commonwealth Secretariat's initiatives, a number of Commonwealth countries had made legislative and procedural provisions to combat gender-based violence, using an integrated approach. At the national level, many Commonwealth countries had succeeded in promoting the human rights of women; some had adopted zero-tolerance policies towards gender-based violence and others had adopted legislation or created special courts to improve the justice system's response to domestic violence. Moreover, the sharing of best practices had helped them make progress in ensuring women's human rights.

94. Despite the achievements, societal structures and prejudices still hindered the full and immediate implementation of women's human rights in the Commonwealth. Hence the need to constantly monitor and address issues related to those rights. Of particular concern was the persistent problem of gender-based violence and the rapid growth in the international trafficking of women and girls.

95. Through its 2005-2015 Plan of Action, the Commonwealth was committed to promoting a rights-based approach to gender equality, by the implementation of national, regional and international human rights instruments and mechanisms. Indeed, one of the critical areas on which the Commonwealth focused was gender, human rights and the law. The main areas highlighted were customary and religious laws and practices; the rapid growth of trafficking in persons, particularly women and girls, many of whom came from countries experiencing internal conflicts and widespread poverty; the plight of indigenous women, 75 million of whom lived in the Commonwealth; the persistent discrimination and disadvantages faced by women at different stages of their life cycle; and the challenge of HIV/AIDS and its impact on women and girls.

96. Despite the continuing challenges, the Commonwealth was encouraged by what had been achieved to date. The new plan would revitalize initiatives until women's rights were no longer a separate human rights issue, but an automatic component of the rights of all human beings.

97. **Ms. Mapara** (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)) said the Federation was pleased that the topic of violence against women had been given a high priority. Its experience at the national level showed that the issue had yet to be adequately addressed, and it endorsed the Secretary-General's call for strengthened legislation and implementation in his report on violence against women (A/59/281).

98. Several issues needed to be discussed in order to achieve a comprehensive framework to combat violence against women. First, the effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic were restricting efforts to assist women in fighting against violence. African Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies had found that, by engaging women as volunteers, they were able not only to empower women but also to make progress in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Second, today nearly half of all migrants were women, and xenophobia and discrimination were often associated with migration. Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies had focused on the issue and often provided the only support migrant women received. Volunteer programmes needed to be increased and strengthened to provide greater attention to the problem. Women volunteers were best able to provide assistance to society, particularly to other women, and could more easily find support systems.

99. One of the Millennium Development Goals concerned universal primary education, and improved education had to be at the heart of any programme whose goal was to change traditional attitudes and help women empower themselves. The issue of empowering women in situations where they were vulnerable to violence had been a concern of IFRC for many years. Although violence against women in refugee camps was often discussed, violence also affected refugee and internally displaced women who were not in camps. By raising the matter in the General Assembly, IFRC hoped that it would be made a priority by relevant United Nations bodies, in addition to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

100. Gender equality and the empowerment of women corresponded to the IFRC gender policy adopted in 1999, which required each Red Cross/Red Crescent Society and the IFRC Secretariat to formulate measures to ensure that the gender-specific vulnerabilities of women and men were systematically identified and addressed.

101. The IFRC had highlighted violence as a priority in its 2003 pledge on non-discrimination and respect for diversity. The Federation looked forward to cooperating actively with the United Nations system as work to counter violence against women proceeded.

102. Governments should work towards a more proactive programme of engaging with civil society and other national groups on the issue. The answers would not be supplied by legislation alone; there had to be profound changes in community attitudes before women and society would see significant improvements.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.